

Jackson's Monkeys.*

BY MICHAEL WHITE.



ANY things are done in the name of the Viceroy and Governor General in Council for which His Excellency can hardly be held accountable personally. For example, the notice in the Indian State Railway carriages pertaining to the exclusion of dogs. If you were to ask the Viceroy about that order he would probably look very much surprised, His Excellency having no knowledge at all of said canine ordinance. But this story has nothing to do with dogs. It relates to an order in council governing the situation in a district overpopulated with monkeys. Said monkeys being holy animals, must not be in any way maltreated, thereby giving offense to Hindu religious prejudice, but on representation to the local authority that shopkeepers and other divers persons are suffering from the depredations of monkeys, said local authority shall order the capture and deportation of as many monkeys as in his judgment will conduce to a relief of the situation. In all respects an admirable rule, but which, like many others, is apt not to work out quite so well in practice. For this reason : The majority of districts, being already overpopulated with monkeys, do not cordially welcome an additional burden of outside deities. Even the pious Hindu is puzzled at times what to do with his legion of animal and other gods. But this did not at all trouble Jackson, when the native headmen of Kotar reported to him that unless measures were taken for their protection, not a grain of rice would be left in the bazaar. The monkeys, led by certain brazen individuals, had swarmed into Kotar, and were growing fat by their depredations. What they did not eat they scattered wantonly, and the merchants, fearful of sacrilege in using force to protect their produce, faced the unfortunate alternative of bankruptcy.

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"We are poor people," pleaded the spokesman of the turbaned and solemn visaged deputation to Jackson. "We grow thin through this misfortune, as the Presence can see for himself. If the Heaven Born pleases, we wish that he will exert his influence with the monkeys, so that we be not utterly ruined, and much sorrow brought on our families."

The Heaven Born Jackson was benevolently pleased to exert his influence, according to the regulation of the Viceroy and Governor-General in Council. He straightway ordered that the ring-leaders of the monkeys be captured and deported. To that end if it was a comparatively easy matter to construct a stout bamboo cage on a railway flat car, not so by any means was capturing the monkeys. Over the thatched roofs, in and out of windows, down rickety stairs, chattering, screaming, leaping from crumbling mud wall to tree bough went the holy monkeys; while for the most part those deputed to catch them did nothing but salaam and beg their Godships to walk into very absurd traps.

You will appreciate Jackson's position when forced to take a hand in the chase. It is quite hot in Kotar, also dusty; so between the flaming red heat and the powdered white dust, the superstitious natives and the elusive monkeys, Jackson liquified several pounds of tissue, and swore a great deal before he captured a score or more of gray-whiskered old villains and landed them securely within the bamboo cage of the flat car. This he dispatched by the next down-country freight train billed for a place called Krishnapur, which was ruled over by a man named Foster.

Jackson thought Foster would help him out with the monkeys, because he had recently done the Deputy Commissioner of Krishnapur a friendly turn. He also felt he had performed his duty toward the people of Kotar, until he received a polite letter from Foster, expressing his regret that he was unable to accommodate any more monkeys in his district, and advising Jackson to try some one else. So back came the grinning, chattering cage of monkeys. Jackson was of course disappointed to see the monkeys, but that was not all, far from it. The native station master of Kotar presented himself with a grave face.

"Sir," said he, "the sahib will recollect that when he ordered the monkeys sent away, there were thirty-one in the cage. Now

behold there are forty-seven. That, as the sahib will understand, is an increase of sixteen monkeys."

The native station master took great pride in his accuracy as to figures, but at the moment it did not soften Jackson's wrath toward Foster seizing the opportunity to unload precisely sixteen of his own undesirable monkeys. He wrote Foster an angry letter about it, promising to get even with him some day, and in the meantime ordered the monkeys sent on up the line to a man named Gardner. In ordinary circumstances it would have been easy to work off the monkeys on Gardner, who, unlike Foster, was always willing to oblige a friend in an emergency. But Jackson's carload of monkeys arrived just at the time that the Hindus were about to celebrate the feast of Hanuman, the Monkey God. So what was more natural than that they should take it as a sign from the God himself that the auspicious hour had come to start a riot and belabor the heads of their Mohammedan fellow subjects.

Thus word was brought to Gardner that a procession, with tom-toms beating, conch shells blowing, clubs brandishing, and much noise and dust, was on its way to the station to receive the newly arrived monkey deities in all honor. On the return journey to Hanuman's temple they hoped to encounter a Mohammedan crowd, with broken heads in consequence. Gardner quickly grasped the situation, so far as ridding himself of the monkeys and the Hindus of their inauspicious omen. He shouted for his horse, and rode straight for the station, happily arriving there before the procession.

"Send that monkey car off by the first train passing," he ordered the native superintendent. "Understand, it's a government order — the first train which passes. Get those beasts away from here as soon as possible."

The native superintendent, being a Mohammedan and caring nothing about monkeys, promised obedience. Then Gardner rode hurriedly away to head off the procession. But he had given what was a very reckless order, because if a native is not absolutely literal he is chaotic. The first train passing was Gardner's order, and that settled it in the native mind. Now the first train which came along happened to be a special, carrying no less a person than the Viceroy and Governor-General of India, on one of his grand

tours to visit native kings and such folk. It did not pull up at the station, Morar being an unimportant place, but stopped beyond just long enough to water the locomotive. But during that short period the native superintendent, with the assistance of a gang of coolies, was able to push the monkey car up and link it on to the rear of the Viceroy's special, such being the Commissioner Sahib's distinct order.

The coupling had barely been adjusted, when the Viceregal special started with a proud blast from the whistle. It sped on through green rice fields, where natives, perched on high fragile platforms to scare away voracious birds and animals, gazed with awe-inspired wonder at the car of gods trailing behind the representative of the Padshah's special. It dashed through Kotar without notice of Jackson, and on until it gradually approached Krishnapur.

As His Excellency purposed holding an informal levee at the Krishnapur railway station, Foster was on the platform in full dress, attended by local native gentlemen in long embroidered coats and brilliant turbans. On the roofs of side buildings swarmed the dark skinned, lightly clad populace. Foster was rather proud of the gathering, as a tribute of native respect to the Viceroy. So, too, thought the Viceroy, when, glancing from the window, he beheld the low saluams of the native gentlemen, and evidently a prodigious interest stirred up on the roofs at his advent. While His Excellency prepared to descend to the platform, Foster, following the absorbed gaze of the native gentlemen turned upon the rear of the train, started with unconcealed astonishment.

"My word!" he gasped. "I'll—I'll be hanged if the Viceroy hasn't brought along Jackson's confounded monkeys. What the deuce does he mean by it?"

The Viceroy stepped to the platform, quite prepared to acknowledge the profound respect which he thought was being paid him, when a wild chattering, screaming chorus rose from the rear of his train. He looked, and saw what was certainly not the usual accompaniment of a Viceregal progress, however much it might impress the native mind. He wanted an explanation at once, and to obtain it the telegraph wires ran hot messages back and forth. When a fairly cohesive report was forthcoming, His

Excellency was inclined to blame Foster as the man within reach of his hand.

"It seems to me," said the Viceroy in a tone of lofty rebuke, "that there is ample room here for Mr. Jackson's surplus monkeys. I consider, Mr. Foster, that your course was open to censure in — er — permitting these — animals — to wander up and down the railways of the Empire, and highly improper that they should have been attached to my — to a Viceregal train. You had better liberate them at once."

The Viceroy went on to see the kings, quite ignorant of the immense prestige he had gained in the province by carrying along a car-load of holy monkeys, and Foster spent more than one anxious night before he felt reassured that he would hear no more of the incident. But what continued to puzzle him was that when the monkeys scrambled out of the cage, sixty thieving old rascals were added to the holy malefactors of his district, together with his sixteen original undesirables returned.

Jackson chuckled when he denied adding the other twenty-nine, and Gardner said he had been too busy to bother with monkeys; so where they came from must remain an unanswered question, unless, as Jackson holds, Hunuman, the Monkey God, sent them by way of retribution for the way in which Foster tried to add to the trouble of a friend.

